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Citation for published version:

Banegas, DL 2018, 'Hacia la comprensión de las concepciones de investigación de los docentes de inglés: Resultados desde Argentina', *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 57-72. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v20n1.61881>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.15446/profile.v20n1.61881](https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v20n1.61881)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development

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Towards Understanding EFL Teachers' Conceptions of Research: Findings From Argentina

Hacia la comprensión de las concepciones de investigación de los docentes de inglés: resultados desde Argentina

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This paper investigates the conceptions of research held by English as a foreign language teachers in Argentina. Quantitative data from 622 participants from an online questionnaire were followed by qualitative data from online interviews with 40 of those participants. Results show that the teachers conceptualised research through conventional notions closer to a quantitative paradigm. They felt research was not part of their job, and a lack of time was the main reason for not engaging in/with research. Teacher development, agency, empowerment, and autonomy could be sought by engaging teachers with forms of research which are meaningful to them, such as action research.

Key words: Agency, research engagement, teacher development, teacher research.

El presente artículo investiga las concepciones de investigación sostenidas por docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera en Argentina. Los datos cuantitativos de 622 participantes obtenidos a través de un cuestionario fueron seguidos por datos cualitativos de entrevistas en línea a 40 participantes. Los resultados muestran que los docentes conceptualizaron a la investigación a través de nociones convencionales cercanas a un paradigma cuantitativo. Los participantes reflejan una posición marginal para con la investigación. La falta de tiempo es la razón principal para no involucrarse en investigación docente. El desarrollo profesional, la agencia, el empoderamiento y la autonomía pueden ser explorados para involucrar a los docentes en formas de investigación, tales como la investigación-acción que les resulten significativas.

Palabras clave: agencia, desarrollo docente, investigación docente, participación en investigación.

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How to cite this article (APA, 6th ed.): Banegas, D. L. (2018). Towards understanding EFL teachers' conceptions of research: Findings from Argentina. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 20(1), 57-72. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v20n1.61881>.

This article was received on January 10, 2017, and accepted on March 26, 2017.

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Introduction

According to Yuan, Sun, and Teng (2016), “the past decades have witnessed a teacher research movement in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL)” (p. 220). Concomitantly, language teacher research engagement has increased in the literature through empirical studies (e.g., Anwaruddin & Pervin, 2015; Borg, 2013; Borg & Liu, 2013; Dikilitaş & Mumford, 2016), instances of practitioner research (Parsaiyan, Ghahremani Ghajar, Salahimoghaddam, & Janahmadi, 2016), literature reviews (Borg, 2010), and a collection of teachers’ research (Borg & Sanchez, 2015a; Dikilitaş, Smith, & Trotman, 2015).

Understanding teacher research engagement may contribute to gaining deeper insights of teacher-researcher identity (Edwards & Burns, 2016a), teacher motivation (Yuan et al., 2016), teachers’ practices, professional development and research (Erlam, 2008; Nassaji, 2012). McKay (2006) observed that “research contributes to more effective teaching, not by offering definitive answers to pedagogical questions, but rather by providing new insights into the teaching and learning process” (p. 1). Nonetheless, Richards (2003) has been critical of imposing research on teachers’ already pressurised schedules.

With an international sample of 13 countries, Borg (2009) published an article on English language teachers’ conceptions of research (also Borg, 2013) to promote teacher research engagement. In my identity as a Latin American teacher-researcher I noticed that the Borg report did not include countries from the Americas, and that most of his 505 respondents had less than 10 years of teaching experience. In contrast, in the present study 40% of the 622 participants had between 20–30 years of experience. A small percentage of the participants did not hold any teaching degree, and that unlike the Borg (2009) study (see also Nassaji, 2012), only a small proportion held MA degrees.

This article aims at exploring the conceptions of research held by English as a foreign language (EFL)

teachers in Argentina. This study is the first of its kind in Argentina, and it may contribute to the visualisation of language teacher development from Latin America as practices from this region do not feature strongly in international journals (but see journals such as *AJAL*, *BELT Journal*, *LACLIL Journal*, or *Profile*, or edited volumes such as Banegas (2017) and Kamhi-Stein, Díaz Maggioli, and de Oliveira (2017). However, the sample of 622 participants and 40 interviews does not attempt to offer overgeneralisations.

Theoretical Background

The term “research” is not easy to define because a definition entails adopting one ideological position. Despite different views on what research is, there is agreement among academics on the key characteristic of research. For example, recent definitions of research in TESOL include:

An investigation, examination or inquiry that requires planning, organising and ethical considerations as well as systematic and careful analysis of data, sound interpretations and conclusions on the basis of evidence and inferences being made. (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015)

To do good research we need to be systematic so that by the end we can stand by our results with confidence... Or in short, research is disciplined inquiry. (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 15)

Yet, how do teachers see research? Understanding language teachers’ conceptions of research is necessary to empower teachers as teacher-researchers (Edwards & Burns, 2016b). It is critical to problematise teachers’ research perceptions through research engagement as a central construct to understand how they conceive research and how they think it should be done. Research engagement, i.e., how teachers interact with research processes and outputs (see Borg, 2016), can become observable through practices such as reading research, using research, and doing research. Furthermore, research engagement is concomitant to the research culture observed and enacted in teachers’ professional settings. Research engagement may be affected and

dependent on institutional support, teacher preparation (see Banegas, 2017), teacher motivation (see Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), and teacher-researcher identity (see Xu, 2014) and power. For example, in a study conducted with four EFL teacher-researchers in Turkey, Yayli (2012) concludes that the unequal distribution of power between researchers and teachers may have a negative impact on teacher research engagement. In this regard, studies on teacher research should examine teachers' views of researchers.

Language teacher education programmes usually include modules on research in language teaching and applied linguistics, or experiences which help pre-service teachers understand research from the inside (Nakata, 2015; Phipps, 2015). Furthermore, in-service teachers sometimes engage with research by reading and using research produced by professional organisations, such as TESOL or IATEFL, and to a lesser extent by universities and research bodies. It is expected that such outputs are used by teachers to inform and improve their practices (Ball, 2012).

Teacher research can be minimally defined as "systematic self-study by teachers (individually or collaboratively) which seeks to achieve real-world impact of some kind and is made public" (Borg & Sanchez, 2015b, p. 1). Teacher research can encompass action research (Burns, 2010; Dikilitaş & Griffiths, 2017) and exploratory practice (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2017) and it is used as continuing professional development in Latin American countries such as Argentina (Banegas, Pavese, Velázquez, & Vélez, 2013), Brazil (Seixas Vial & Kurtz de Souza Welp, 2015), Chile (Burns, Westmacott, & Hidalgo Ferrer, 2016; Smith, Connelly, & Rebolledo, 2014), Mexico (Roux & Mendoza Valladares, 2014) and in other countries, for example Australia (Edwards & Burns, 2016b), China (Wang & Zhang, 2014; Yuan et al., 2016), or Turkey (Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2015). Previous research reports how future teachers (Villacañas de Castro, 2014) and practising teachers engage in action research to bridge the so-called gap between theory

and practice and produce context-responsive answers to their classroom concerns (Edwards & Burns, 2015).

Teacher research engagement has been the object of a few studies in TESOL. For example, Borg's (2009) study, the pillar of this investigation, was based on data collected from 505 teachers from 13 countries. A high proportion of respondents showed limited engagement in and with research due to a lack of time and, secondly, little knowledge about research. In a similar study, Nassaji (2012) investigated English language teachers' perceptions of links and relevance of second language (L2) research in language teaching. The study was based on a written questionnaire completed by 119 EFL teachers teaching in Turkey and 82 English as a second language (ESL) teachers teaching in Canada. Due to a lack of time, they rarely or never read research articles or conducted research themselves. Results indicated that the teachers undervalued the relevance of academics' research in language teaching from a practical classroom stance (Xu, 2014).

In a mixed-methods study about Bangladeshi English language teachers' research engagement, Anwaruddin and Pervin's (2015, p. 29) results reveal no engagement with reading research. The most frequent reasons were: (1) "my institution does not encourage me to read research," (2) "reading research is not necessary to keep my job or get a promotion," (3) "I face difficulty in understanding research articles," (4) "I don't have enough time to read research." Based on the interviews, the authors add that poor teacher salary is another major obstacle for engaging with research.

Despite drawbacks, teachers do become involved in research undertakings and therefore it is necessary to investigate how such experiences have an impact on their perceptions of research, their teaching practices, motivations, and identities.

Teacher Research in Argentina

Research is central to initial English language teacher education (IELTE) programmes based at Argentinian

universities. In the case of pre-service teacher education at the tertiary level, since the 1990s there has been a national interest in equipping future teachers with an awareness of educational research tools to examine their practices (Dirección Nacional de Formación e Investigación, 2013). According to Banegas (2014), some programmes include Research in the ELT module with a special focus on action research and mixed methods as described in, for example, Brown (2014).

In-service opportunities to engage in and with research are often channelled through teacher associations (Porto, Montemayor-Borsinger, & López-Barrios, 2016). For example, the Argentine Federation of Associations of Teachers of English (FAAPI in Spanish) launched the *Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, an open access online journal, in 2013 with the aim of encouraging teachers, teacher educators, and researchers in the country and elsewhere to publish not only research reports, but also reflective pieces and informed classroom accounts and activities. Furthermore, FAAPI organise a well-established annual conference for the dissemination of teachers' and teacher educators' concerns through the open access Selected Papers.¹

Against this background, the following questions guided this study:

1. What do EFL teachers in Argentina think of research?
2. How do they engage in and with research?

Method

The design of this study, an extension of Borg's (2009), follows a sequential explanatory multi-method strategy (Creswell, 2003). In the present study, large quantitative data collected through an online questionnaire were followed by qualitative data obtained through online interviews with a reduced teacher sample from those who completed the questionnaire.

In June 2015, an English-medium online questionnaire was uploaded at an IELTE programme website² and promoted through FAAPI and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The online questionnaire was completed by 622 EFL teachers in Argentina between June and October 2015. Initially, 178 (28.6%) of those participants accepted being interviewed. Due to participants' personal and workload issues, only 40 (6.43%) were eventually interviewed through Skype between November 2015 and March 2016. The use of Skype was grounded on the fact that the main interviewer and assistants were located in a remote southern area in Argentina and most of the interviewees were in the centre and the northern part of the country. For the interviews, it was ensured that the 40 participants represented a balanced sample of geographical distribution in the country, years of experience, and the educational level in which they worked. This distribution was achieved through selective sampling of those 40 interviewees. In this respect, the qualitative findings cannot be generalised over the total number of participants or those who were not interviewed.

The online questionnaire mirrored Borg's (2009) survey, which consisted of: background information (e.g., degree, teaching experience), scenarios (through a Likert scale participants had to decide whether each scenario represented research), characteristics of good quality research, research culture at their place of work, reading/not reading research, doing/not doing research, and a final question to participate in the follow-up interview. Modifications were made to respond to Argentinian teachers' professional settings: details on background information (e.g., type of teaching degree, type(s) of teaching experience, and nature of posts), localised scenarios and terminology (e.g., evaluating revised curricula in the participants' province, referring to a *licenciatura* rather than an MA course, ELT coordinator instead of head of the English department).

¹ FAAPI Selected Papers at <http://www.faapi.org.ar/congreso-faapi/publications/>

² Online survey at <https://es.surveymonkey.com/r/eltarg>

The follow-up interview consisted of revisiting those answers provided by the participants for clarification and illustration purposes. Unlike Borg's (2009) study, given the digital format of the present survey, respondents' answers were tracked for comparative purposes (e.g., a participant's view of what research is and his/her claimed experience with reading or doing research). Interviews, carried out in Spanish to encourage rapport, lasted between 30-60 minutes and were audio recorded and orthographically transcribed. Through initial coding and thematic analysis (Creswell, 2007) the interviews provided illustrative excerpts which could show alignment, dissonances, and contradictions with the survey results.

Findings

The first section shows the findings obtained from the survey regarding the participants' professional background and teaching experience. The second section presents percentages of answers over the total number of 622 respondents. The last section shows the qualitative data derived from the follow-up interviews following thematic analysis.

Participants' Background

Background information about participants was recovered from Questions 1-6 in the survey (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Respondents' Years of Experience

Years of teaching experience	N	%
0-4	72	11.6
5-9	94	15.1
10-14	100	16.1
15-19	104	16.7
20-24	94	15.1
25+	158	25.4

Table 2. Respondents' Highest Relevant Qualification

Highest relevant qualification	N	%
None	8	1.3
Language proficiency certificate (e.g., Cambridge ESOL exams)	24	3.9
Diploma (e.g., Delta)	10	1.6
Teacher of English degree from a tertiary institution	298	47.9
University degree (teaching or translating degree)	188	30.2
Master's	76	12.2
Doctorate	18	2.9

Respondents were asked the type of institution where they taught most often (state sector: 49.8%, private sector: 38.6 %, and subsidised: 11.6%), the age of the learners (11 or younger: 19.3%, 12-18: 51.1%, 19-23: 14.8%, and 24+: 14.8%), and the nature of their work. As regards this last background aspect, 54.7% of the respondents had teaching periods, while 30.9% of them held teaching periods and posts, possibly part-time. Only 14.5% had full-time posts. It is worth mentioning that teachers who only held teaching periods (around 30 a week) were only paid for their teaching time. Other activities such as marking or meetings are part of their posts but unacknowledged in the salary.

Survey Findings: Scenarios

Question 7 of the online questionnaire included 10 scenarios (e.g., A school head met ELT teachers as a group and asked them to evaluate the "diseños curriculares" [jurisdictional curricula]. She made notes and used them to write a report which she submitted to the Ministerio de Educación). Respondents were asked to determine the extent to which each was an example of research (Table 3) through a four-point Likert scale which ranged from "definitely not research" to "definitely research."

Table 3. What Scenarios Are Research?

Scenario #	Definitely not research	Probably not research	Probably research	Definitely research
1	23.1	23.1	43.9	9.9
2	2.7	7.7	32.6	57
3	21.7	20.8	32.1	25.3
4	3.6	8.6	33	54.7
5	4.1	10.8	48.9	36.2
6	4.1	13.1	37.6	45.2
7	22.6	28.9	32.1	16.3
8	28.1	33.9	26.7	11.3
9	22.2	26.2	35.7	15.8
10	16.3	29.9	36.2	17.6

There was a tendency (64.9%) to assess the scenarios as instances of research. The “probably research” option gathered 35.9% of responses, while “definitely research” represented 29%.

Scenarios 2 (89.6%), 4 (87.7%), and 6 (82.8%) were assessed the most as examples of research. Scenario 2 stated: “A teacher read about a new approach to teaching writing and tried it out for two weeks. He videotaped some of his lessons and collected samples of learners’ work. He analysed this information and presented the results to his colleagues at a meeting.”

Conversely, scenario 8 was not considered research by 62%. Scenario 8 read: “At the beginning of the second term, a teacher gave a class of 30 learners a feedback form. The next day, 5 returned their completed forms. The teacher read them and used that info to decide what to do in the second and third terms.”

In general, research was identified as a systematic and academic practice. Systematicity can be achieved, according to the responses, through the collection and analysis of large data and the dissemination of findings.

Characteristics of “Good” Research

In Question 8 participants rated different features of research according to their importance (Table 4).

Objectivity was found to be central to good research. Participants also underlined the importance of hypotheses, variables, and a large amount of data. These features seem to signal that participants believed that good research equated a positivist paradigm in research. They also underlined the necessity of socialising findings, which should offer practical ideas for classroom situations.

Furthermore, participants had an optional question about other features that good quality research should have. Their 198 answers were organised through selective coding. The most cited characteristics of good research included: practical implications for teachers in different and “real” settings (112 respondents), updated bibliography (45 respondents), a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (32), a solid literature review (30), and clear aims (15). Those who mentioned qualitative instruments observed that the items in the questionnaire were quantitative-oriented and felt they did not apply to ELT research.

Overall, these results might indicate that teachers believed that good research must be carefully supported and offer in-depth analysis of classroom life with direct resonances with practice. In other words, there is pressure for research to offer direct applications in teachers’

Table 4. Reported Features of Good Research

Item	Unimportant	Moderately important	Unsure	Important	Very important
1. A large number of people are studied.	10.4	27.5	11.4	31.3	19.4
2. A large volume of information is collected.	6.6	21.8	9.9	40.3	21.3
3. Experiments are used.	15.1	17.5	16.6	31.7	19.0
4. Hypotheses are tested.	4.3	5.7	3.3	32.2	54.5
5. Information is analysed statistically.	7.1	19.0	7.6	42.6	23.7
6. Questionnaires are used.	15.6	24.6	15.1	33.6	10.9
7. The researcher is objective.	3.8	4.7	4.7	24.2	62.6
8. The results apply to many ELT contexts.	10.9	19.9	18.5	25.6	25.1
9. The results are made public.	5.7	9.5	9.9	35.5	39.3
10. The results give teachers ideas they can use.	3.3	11.8	10.9	28.9	45
11. Variables are controlled.	5.7	12.8	18	34.1	29.4

professional contexts, a feature not usually included in academics' definitions of research.

Research Culture

In relation to the research culture where they worked most often (Question 10), respondents' opinions pictured the landscape shown in Table 5.

Table 5 shows a trend to disagree with the statements. This suggests that research attitudes and conditions are far from conducive in their contexts. However, relativised opinions were evidenced, judging by the percentages under the "do-not-know option," meaning a lack of awareness of their colleagues' attitudes towards research. Such apparent lack of knowledge may respond to the high negative percentages given to Items 6, 7, and 8.

It can be advanced that the research culture perceived by participants did not encourage teacher research engagement as lack of awareness, access, support, and benefits operated against teachers researching their own professional contexts.

Reading Research

Questions 12-13 explored participant's engagement with research through reading and its impact in their practices. Results revealed the following reading frequencies: 44.8% (often), 36.4% (sometimes), 17% (rarely), and 1.8% (never).

Those who said that they often or sometimes read research mentioned the following outputs: web-based sources of research (75.2%), books (72.6%), newsletters (64.3%), academic journals (58%), professional journals (58%), professional magazines (48.2%), and others (7%). Other sources included: dissertations, Academia.edu, conference proceedings, and blogs. According to these respondents, the influence of those who read research on their teaching was distributed as follows: strong (20.5%), fairly strong (40.4%), moderate influence (33.3%), slight influence (5.8%), and no influence (0%). Interestingly, in the interviews, those who said that research influence was fairly strong or moderate usually referred to practice-oriented outputs such as newsletters, magazines for

Table 5. Research Attitudes in the Participants' Context

Research attitudes in your context	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Do not know	Agree	Agree strongly
1. Teachers do research themselves.	12	27.1	26	27.6	7.3
2. The management encourages teachers to do research.	11.5	37	14.6	27.6	9.4
3. Teachers feel that doing research is an important part of their job.	13.5	29.7	21.3	27.1	8.3
4. Teachers have access to research books and journals.	12	19.3	22.4	35.4	10.9
5. Teachers have opportunities to learn about current research.	9.4	19.8	17.2	40.6	13
6. Teachers talk about research.	16.1	35.9	15.1	23.9	8.9
7. Teachers are given support to attend elt conferences.	26	23.9	7.8	28.1	19.3
8. Time for doing research is built into teachers' workloads.	35.9	20.8	13.5	16.1	13.5
9. Teachers read published research.	19.3	18.7	32.8	25.5	8.9

teachers, or blogs which display activities and worksheets. Responses reveal a contrast between what these teachers deemed as good research and reading sources which are essentially practice-based and not necessarily context-responsive. Conversely, those who expressed that they rarely or never read research justified their behaviour as Table 6 shows.

Table 6. Reasons for not Reading Research

Reasons for not reading research	%
I am not interested in research	3.0
I don't have time	60.6
I don't have access to books and journals	30.3
I find published research hard to understand	12.1
Published research does not give me practical advice for the classroom	30.3

Research engagement through reading research was present in teachers' lives. However, there seem to be a wide array of outputs which does not always base its publications on primary research. It should be stressed that even though lack of time is a powerful obstacle, teachers still engaged with reading research to answer their professional challenges.

Doing Research

Participants indicated their engagement in doing research: often (30.4%), sometimes (35.1%), rarely (24.1%), and never (10.5%). The interpretation of such figures (Table 7), however, depends on the respondents' conceptions of research and their interpretation of such frequencies.

Conversely, those who said that they rarely or never did research selected the statements shown in Table 8.

Table 7. Reasons for Doing Research

I often/sometimes do research...	%
as part of a course I am studying on.	52.6
because I enjoy it.	69
to gain recognition.	19
because it is good for my professional development.	87.1
because my employer expects me to.	13.8
because other teachers can benefit from my findings.	36.2
to secure my post.	15.5
to contribute to my school improvement.	44.0
to find better ways of teaching.	80.2
to solve a problem in my teaching.	66.4
to work from home.	6
to do less teaching.	0
to avoid the constraints of a teaching schedule.	5.2
Other: To keep up with the pace of change Because it's part of my post To participate in academic events	

Doing research then was still an activity present in the participants' lives. Reasons could be professional development and classroom practices (e.g., better teaching, solve a problem in teaching) together with personal motivations (e.g., because I enjoy it). Conversely, reasons for not doing research were time constraints and lack of knowledge about research methods.

Interview Findings

From the 40 interviews conducted with teachers three main themes around teacher research engagement emerged: (1) research features (e.g., systematicity, practical implications), (2) research forms (e.g., action research or quasi-experiments), and (3) identities (teachers' and researchers'). Numbers of participants with similar views appear in brackets followed by representative quotes from the 40 interviews transcribed.

Table 8. Reasons for not Doing Research

I rarely/never do research because...	%
I don't know enough about research methods.	45.3
my job is to teach not to do research.	9.4
I'm not paid for that.	23.4
I don't have time to do research.	81.3
my employer discourages it.	3.1
I'm not interested in research.	9.4
I need someone to advise me but no one is available.	25
most of my colleagues don't do research.	26.6
I don't have access to the books and journals I need.	1.6
the learners wouldn't cooperate if I did research in class.	1.6
other teachers wouldn't cooperate if I asked for their help.	9.4
I don't know what I can investigate.	31.3

In general, the 40 participants confirmed the results of Table 4. Research features such as generalisability, systematisation of data collection and analysis (30 participants), presence of hypotheses (12), and a need to make results public (12) through different outputs (e.g., conferences, informal teachers' meetings) were considered important. The excerpts (E) below illustrate such views:

Good research has to be generalisable. You need a lot of data, numbers, figures, experiments. If I do something with my students, it's very small. And besides it must be shared, call it a conference, a meeting, something more informal. (E1)

You need to be objective to do research. I mean looking at results, at hard data that you compare against a hypothesis. An experiment in a classroom. We need information more than what people think because this is very subjective and limited. (E2)

However, other features emerged. Although practical research implications had been also endorsed in the survey (Table 4, Item 10), some participants (21) emphasised that research results had to lead to change, but such change could only be achieved through collaboration (15):

You can do research through questionnaires, but the results are to make a change, I mean, to help you change something with your teaching. (E3)

I come from action research as a teacher educator, so I see research as an instance to change and inform our changes. But I can't do it alone. (E4)

We don't need results like 50% said this and 20% said that. We need help. We need guidance. I've got students who do drugs. I've got abused students. Who can help us with these issues? Research has to help us change that terrible problem. (E5)

Only six participants explained that experiences carried out by one teacher with their learners did not constitute research. Two participants expressed that:

If you're a responsible teacher, then you will assess your own work and evaluate your own practice with your students. But that can't be research. It's just you and them. (E6)

Just what one teacher does is not research, I don't know. One swallow doesn't make a summer. (E7)

Although these two excerpts reinforce the need for a large number of participants, they will be compared below to other views expressed by the same participants.

The results presented in Table 3 show a heterogeneous vision of what counts as research. Only one participant expressed that such amplitude of responses was the result of uncertainty about what research is by "those who do research":

I felt bad when completing this question. To me they were somehow all forms of research. The scenarios made me feel that I need to learn more about this from people who actually do research. I felt confused. (E8)

Similarly, different forms of research emerged from the interviews when they were asked about their experiences with doing research. The number of participants who had indicated doing research represented around 60% of the total number of respondents. However, in the interview, 30 participants claimed to have done research in different forms. In the interviews, the participants (12) from higher education institutions coincided in describing instances of doing research which involved a problem, data collection and analysis and sharing of results through, mostly, conference proceedings and paper presentations. They reportedly used quantitative and qualitative methods, action research, and critical discourse tools. Their experiences were located in the areas of information technology and its influence on ELT, English for academic/specific purposes, literature, phonetics and phonology, systemic functional linguistics, and cultural studies. Some of them (5) even published their research in conference proceedings.

In contrast, the participating teachers based at secondary schools (18) had other experiences which they regarded as research. These ranged from bibliographical search (9 participants, Excerpt 9) to teachers' practices evaluation (6, Excerpt 10), and cases to change teaching practices (5, Excerpt 11). It should be noted that two participants who expressed that small-case studies do not count as research voiced their opinions in Excerpts 10 and 11.

I sometimes start collecting information about a specific topic, like the state of the art. A couple of years ago, I wrote a paper about bullying. I used different sources. I wanted to condense the information for me to have a clear idea and think about how I could help at the schools where I work. (E9)

Last year I asked my learners to assess my work and their own work. Then we compared our different perceptions. (E10)

In 2014, I asked my trainees to complete an online questionnaire about strategies for listening comprehension. I repeated the questionnaire in 2015. I used those results with the trainees to compare groups and think about how to improve our practices for 2016. (E11)

An interview recurrence was that of identity in relation to both teachers and researchers. While teachers, and even teacher educators, perceived themselves as practitioners only (13 participants), they perceived researchers as distant intellectuals (7):

I'm only a teacher. I teach. Who am I to say what is and what isn't research? I'm not a researcher. I don't want to tell people how they should do what they do. (E12)

Why should I do research? I teach and that's quite enough. Besides, you can't expect EVERYTHING from a teacher. Research is important, I guess. To do research we need to know how to do it, and we need to be paid for research. Otherwise, it's very easy. I do the work but someone else will take the credit? (E13)

Research is useless. It's very far from our realities. Researchers from the uni don't come to schools to work with us. They get their information and then bye bye. They have no idea of practice. (E14)

I'm not interested in research because those up there who do research are not interested in us teachers. (E15)

Maybe it's not real research what I do, but it's what I can do as a teacher. (E16)

Discussion

Conceptions of Research

Based on Tables 3 and 4 and Excerpts 1-7, the participants conceive research as an academic activity characterised by systematicity, objectivity, varied data collection instruments (e.g., questionnaires or surveys), analysis, and socialisation of findings which are expected to be generalisable and with classroom application. As regards systematisation and data analysis, their conceptions are similar to the definitions of research included above (Dörnyei, 2007; Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015). However, they add an element of direct practicality to research.

Although the participants mentioned the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, the collective view held was that of research under a psychometric tradition. To them, good research included

hypotheses and tests. Excerpts 1 and 2 illustrate that teachers believed that the nature of the data must be obtained through quantitative instruments and that people's opinions do not count because they are not objective. This view shows that qualitative research may be assessed as anecdotal or context-bound and that makes it less useful to others (Excerpts 6 and 7). However, some of the participants who held such quantitative and positivistic research views offered divergent practices (e.g., asking learners' opinions about their teaching performance) when asked about their ways of doing research (Excerpts 10 and 11). Only those respondents who endorsed action research adhered to an ethnographic and qualitative tradition.

Thus, research is conceived as carried out by other professionals rather than teachers as if university-based academics were the only authoritative figures to produce research (Excerpts 12 and 15). Research is not for all. This notion may explain participants' self-marginalisation to research. They believe that they cannot be producers of research but are expected to be the consumers of the by-products of research. The value of research appeared as relative, decontextualised, and not part of a teacher's job or professional development. There was a tendency (Table 4, Item 10) to rate it as important that research should offer practical suggestions for teachers, but this feature did not seem to be found by teachers in practice (Table 6). The ambivalent view between research being important but useless to teachers was further supported by the participants' perceptions of researchers (e.g., Excerpt 15), who are usually seen at universities or in distant geographical locations. Research, understood through orientation metaphors, is *up there; out there*.

These results reveal the need that, as Xu (2014) and Edwards and Burns (2016a) conclude, the identity of teachers as researchers should be explored and promoted so that other enacted forms of research are acknowledged without normativity judgements from academics. Furthermore, examining these divergent

research views as contradictory could be assessed as simplistic.

Results show different views between school EFL teachers and higher education lecturers/tutors. The secondary school EFL teachers in this study indicated that there were opportunities to learn about current research, yet research engagement was limited and not encouraged or supported institutionally. In the higher education context, there were differences between those from tertiary institutions and universities. Even when this latter group was aware of research, their views were heterogeneous and did not show signs of research collaboration between institutions of different levels of education. The apparent fractures in the research culture as we move from one level of education to the following may explain why teachers in primary and secondary education felt that research was not for them (Excerpt 16).

Given the heterogeneity of the participants' background, their experiences and responses, it may be suggested that the participating teachers envisage research in a continuum. In this continuum, the two ends are: (1) research characterised by quantitative methods and large samples, and (2) research featuring qualitative methods and case studies with a direct impact on classroom practices as is the case of action research. In this continuum and following participants' conceptions of research, researchers based at universities or settings different from schools lead the first end. From this end, research should be objective, generalisable, and based on hypotheses. The second end, in contrast, is led by teachers and teacher educators. From this end, research is conceived as context-bound to solve problems and enhance classroom practices. It can be added that while the first end may represent teachers' declarative knowledge, that is, what research is expected to be, the second end represents their enactment of research activities, that is, what teachers can do in their immediate contexts.

Research Engagement

It has been posited that teachers' conceptions of research may influence their research engagement through reading and doing research.

While teachers reading research was not deemed as a systematic attitude in their contexts (Table 5, 34.4%), 81.2% of the participants later indicated they read published research. Those respondents, who clarified differences between survey questions, expressed that they had "other colleagues in mind" the first time they answered. Published research included books and digitised materials, and research exerted a strong influence on their teaching practices. However, this influence was instrumental thus strengthening the view of teachers as receptors and consumers of research produced elsewhere. We should be cautious about this positive engagement with research as their "reading research" habits and reading sources depend on what each participating teacher deemed as research. This positive engagement may contradict the relatively low percentages obtained in relation to value of research, access to published research, and the research culture at the workplace (Table 5).

Conversely, those who said that they did not read research found three restrictions: lack of time, lack of access to research outputs, and lack of practical advice. Lack of time is consistent with the fact that research is not encouraged or part of a teacher's post and, in order to engage with research, teachers need to invest part of their personal time. Lack of access and lack of practical advice were mentioned by primary and secondary EFL teachers.

In relation to doing research, answers were heterogeneous possibly because they responded to the views of research the participants held. Around 60% claimed to do research. Table 7 shows the variety of motivations underpinning their engagement. Following Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), the motivations to do research were personal/intrinsic (I enjoy it), extrinsic

(to secure my post), practice-oriented/teaching efficacy (to teach better, to solve problems), identity-driven (to gain recognition), and professional-focused (individual and collective professional development). Those who engaged in research held a wide range of reasons, which stresses the complex relationship between teacher motivation and teacher research. Such a relationship can be examined from a relational in-context working framework as many teachers do engage in research even when it is not part of their jobs or does not grant them any benefits (Anwaruddin & Pervin, 2015).

Lack of time and lack of knowledge of research were assessed as obstacles by both teachers in secondary and higher education settings. However, it may be true that their perceived lack of knowledge may derive from their engagement with research, research awareness, and professional trajectories. In other words, their limited opportunities to access reports and attend conferences, for example, have an impact on their experiences with research. Therefore, they only know about what research should be in academic circles and do not know what research can be like in other professional settings.

Interestingly, the collaborative and social nature of research and knowledge generation emerges here as the participants felt the need of an expert or of colleagues to engage in research. Such connections between research engagement and motivation resonate with Yuan et al.'s (2016) study in relation to external encouragement, support, and incentives to do research. It seems that the Argentinian EFL teachers interviewed may need external support as novice researchers, but once they gain experience and recognition, they initiate a process where internal drives exceed external factors.

Thus, it can be concluded that teachers' engagement with research strengthens the view of a continuum to organise teachers' perceptions of research. In their view, there exists a difference between what researchers do and what teachers and teacher educators do. As indicated above, research is perceived as quantitative

and led by researchers. At such an end, research seems to be less flexible. At the other end, in contrast, research is more flexible, classroom-driven, and carried out by teachers despite different constraints.

Conclusion

Albeit limited, this study reveals that Argentinian EFL teachers' conceptions of research and research engagement do not differ from the results in Borg (2009) and Nassaji (2012). Working conditions, nature of teaching posts (e.g., part-time vs. full-time teachers), and salary issues exert a particular influence on Argentinian teachers. Research is considered important but there exist difficulties to see its direct benefits. Teachers may struggle with research given the workload generated by teaching, their general expectations on research, and their identity as "just teachers". Power, agency, identity, and monolithic notions of research constitute constant factors. Understanding research conceptions through a continuum can help in the development of flexible and realistic forms of research conducted by teachers.

It may be necessary to address the factors mentioned above from pre-service teacher education programmes where research should be embraced from a stance which integrates practice and theory and where trainees and also trainers engage with research from the start. In addition, collaborative research projects should be explored (Wang & Zhang, 2014), but these should become innovative as regards roles so that teachers do not feel as data gatherers or informants only. In this sense, paternalistic practices should be replaced by practices and critical ideologies which promote agency, autonomy, and empowerment.

With the aim of promoting teacher research engagement drawing on teachers' understandings of research, action-research projects can be devised with language teachers as suggested in the literature (Edwards & Burns, 2015; Smith et al., 2014). Action research may

give teachers the opportunity to engage in research from a practical angle and help them theorise their practices so that the distance between theory and practice, as discussed in Erlam (2008), is reduced. Following the continuum introduced above, teachers can move from consumers of research produced elsewhere to producers of context-responsive action research.

In line with Richards' (2003) warning, teachers' engagement with research should be a bottom-up process rather than an imposed, over-demanding, and unrealistic task. If teacher research is the process of teachers examining their practices and pedagogical contexts to understand and improve teaching and learning processes, it follows that they should be in a position to determine, as Borg and Sanchez (2015b) indicate, the whats, hows, and whens of research. Furthermore, research in all its forms should be more accessible and written in more friendly manners so that the impact of findings reaches a wider community.

At the level of meta-research, this study shows that the use of an online questionnaire followed by a Skype interview acted as an instance of reflection and sharing. However, it should be mentioned that 40 teachers cannot represent the opinions of the rest of the 622 participants involved. Many respondents revealed that the time between the online questionnaire and the interview gave them the opportunity to examine their own beliefs and practices. Others said that after they completed the questionnaire, they embarked on a journal search and found helpful open-access journals. These events may suggest that in-service teacher development opportunities should also seek to promote collaborative research and writing and help colleagues make their research outputs visible. Factors such as accessibility and socialisation should become stronger and endorsed by educational institutions across contexts. Certainly, more research is needed to find out the effect of research modules in initial teacher education during a course and after graduating, and how EFL teacher-initiated research informs institutional

and curriculum policies in a wider context. Similarly, it would be worth exploring novice EFL teachers' views on research.

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